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AUTHOR Schult, Deborah G.; Schneider, Lawrence J.
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ABSTRACT

Public reactions to rape affect victims in a variety of ways and have implications for psychological services and legal adjudication of rape defendants. To investigate reactions to rape, 144 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (male versus female subjects) x 2 (victim with versus without rape history) x 3 (high versus medium versus low level of victim provocation) between subject design. After reading a fictional police report that manipulated rape history and victim provocation, participants completed a nine-item Rape Questionnaire concerning perceptions of the victim and assailant. The results indicated sex by provocativeness interaction and main effects for all three independent variables. Subjects attributed increasing amounts of blame to the victim as her level of provocativeness intensified. Victims with a rape history were blamed more than were victims without a rape history. Subject sex was found to influence attributions of blame. Males, more than females, appeared to ascribe to victim's acceptance of blame in proportion to her degree of provocativeness prior to the attack. Females tended to be more empathic toward victims and more accusatory of the assailant than were males. Implications of these sex differences may be significant for the rape victim. To the extent that service providers of each gender differentially ascribe to views about rape, the victim may encounter more initial acceptance from females. (NB)

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Attribution of Blame Toward Rape Victims

Deborah G. Schult

and

Lawrence J. Schneider

North Texas State University

CG 019762

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Abstract

Public reactions to rape effects victims in a variety of ways and have implications for psychological services and legal adjudication of rape defendants. To investigate reactions to rape, 144 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2(male vs. female subjects) X 2(victim with vs. without prior rape history) X 3(high vs. medium vs. low level of victim provocation) between subjects design. After reading a fictional police report that manipulated rape history and victim provocation, participants completed a nine item questionnaire concerning perceptions of the victim and assailant. MANOVA indicated sex by provocativeness interaction and main effects for all three independent variables. Implications of the public's perceptions of rape are discussed.

Attribution of Blame Toward Rape Victims

Public attitudes toward rape and the rape victim appear to effect the victim in a variety of ways. These attitudes often impact upon the rape victim's decision whether to report the crime or remain silent, the victim's feelings of self-esteem and general psychological adjustment following the rape, and immediate and long term effects on the victim's behavior patterns (Resick, Calhoun, Atkeson & Ellis, 1981; Holmstrom & Burgess, 1978).

Recent studies on rape reflect growing concern regarding the rape victim. One controversial issue concerns whether or not the victim was "asking" for or provoked the rape in some way. An example of the devaluation of the victim promoted by this opinion is documented in the Report of the Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice (American Psychological Association, 1975). One individual comments:

> A psychoanalytically-oriented male therapist, with some agreement from some of the other male (therapists), insisted that there was no such thing as rape -- that the woman always "asked" for it in some way. (p. 1172)

The rape victim then seems to be blamed for the offense committed against her. Many attribute blame to the

victim and view her as somehow contributing to the rape. One way that individuals justify this view is to perceive the victim as behaving in a sexually provocative manner.

Role of Provocativeness

One of the earlier studies examining the role of victim's provocativeness was conducted by Scroggs (1976) who looked at penalties assigned for rape as a function of the victim's provocativeness and amount of damage suffered by the victim. Scroggs varied victim provocativeness as a function of the woman's attire and victim damage as a function of whether or not a pregnancy resulted from the rape. The provocation effect approached significance in the expected direction -- that is, rapists of provocative victims tended to be given more lenient sentences than did rapists of nonprovocative victims. No significant differences between the sexes were noted.

In a study conducted in India, Kanekar & Kolsawalla (1981) investigated perceptions of the victim's role in a rape by focusing on the degree of blame attributed to the victim. They hypothesized that the attribution of blame to the victim would be a function of her respectability and sexual provocativeness, as well as the respectability of the rapist. A significant triple interaction was found involving observers' sex, victim's respectability, and victim's provocativeness ($p < .05$). The only significant

difference between the married and divorced victim was found in the female subject's response to the unprovocative victim. Women viewed the married unprovocative victim as less at fault than the divorced unprovocative victim ($p < .05$). The only significant difference between male and female subjects involved the married unprovocative victim to whom males attributed greater blame than female subjects ($p < .01$).

Kanekar, Kolsawalla, and D'Souza (1981) further investigated the social status of both the rapist and the rape victim and also the victim's sexual provocativeness. The major focus of this study was the possible interaction between victim's social status and victim's provocativeness. A triple interaction emerged involving subject's sex, victim's status, and victim's provocativeness ($p < .05$). In all conditions relevant to this interaction, the provocative victim was seen as more at fault than was the unprovocative victim. However, this difference was significant only for the low status victim in the case of male subjects ($p < .025$) and for the high status victim in the case of female subjects ($p < .001$).

In a companion experiment, Kanekar et al. (1981) investigated the distinction between causal and moral responsibility attributed to a rape victim, victim status, victim provocativeness, and observer sex. Subjects were

given the task of recommending a prison term. Significant main effects for subject's sex ($p < .025$), as well as for victim's provocativeness ($p < .001$) and a significant interaction between subject's sex and victim's attractiveness ($p < .05$) were found for likelihood of rape for the provocative victim.

Best and Demin (1982) examined victim's provocativeness and victim's attractiveness as determinants of blame in rape. Subjects read four stories after which they evaluated the degree of blame the victim and rapist should be assigned for precipitating the rape. Analysis of covariance on the ratings of the victim's blameworthiness, using the ratings of rapist blameworthiness as covariate, showed the provocative victims being blamed significantly more than nonprovocative victims ($p < .01$). A second analysis of covariance on the rating of the rapist's blameworthiness, using the ratings of the victim's blameworthiness as a covariate, indicated that rapists were blamed significantly less when their victim's were provocative than when they were not provocative.

These studies suggest that provocative victims are attributed more blame for the rape than are nonprovocative victims. Consistent with this finding the rapist of a provocative victim is blamed less and sentenced more leniently than a rapist of a nonprovocative victim.

Victim's Sexual History

Recent studies reveal the tendency of the general public to incorporate a variety of extra-legal factors in their perceptions of rape victims such as prior chastity (Berger, 1977) and victim-rapist relationship (Krulewitz, 1982). One such factor concerns the sexual history of the victim. Prior sexual experience, whether voluntary or involuntary, appears to influence a rape victim's credibility (Rose & Randall, 1982; Cann, Calhoun, & Selby, 1979; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982). One result of this type of logic is that a victim with a sexual history might be perceived as possessing qualities sufficient for inducing a rape, and therefore will be held accountable for a greater degree of blame. (Amir, 1971).

Calhoun, Selby and Warring (1976) examined the social perception of a rape victim's personal characteristics and degree of blame for the rape. Male and female subjects observed a videotape of a twenty-five year old white female role-playing a rape victim. Prior to viewing a videotape interview of the victim, each subject received a case description which varied the victim's previous acquaintance with the rapist, rape history (whether or not she had been raped before) and the number of rapes in the area where the rape occurred. The victim with a prior rape history was

judged to possess the personality traits responsible for the rape more than the victim having no rape history.

Sex of Subject

Of the many factors which may potentially affect the perception of the rape victim, sex of the observer subject emerges as an important factor. Females recommend harsher sentences for the rapist to a greater degree than do males (Calhoun et al., 1976). In general males are more likely to take the rapist's side, share the rapist's perspective, and blame the victim more than females. The implications of these sex differences are significant in that rape victims often come in contact with police, judges, jurors and medical personnel, many of whom are male.

This study manipulated the victim's rape history, degree of provocativeness, and observer sex to investigate how these factors affect attributions of blame.

Method

Subjects

Subjects consisted of 72 males and 72 female undergraduates enrolled in psychology courses.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire (DQ). A DQ was used to gather descriptive information: (a) age; (b) sex; (c) ethnic status; (d) marital status; (e) religious preference; and (f) degree currently working toward.

Rape Questionnaire (RQ). The RQ consisted of nine items (see Table 3) assessing the attribution of blame toward the rape victim and the assailant. Four items were adapted from Krulewitz (1982) while the remaining five were drawn from Cann, et al. (1979). Items were rated on a Likert-type scale which presented seven response alternatives with 1 representing "Not at All" and 7 representing "Very Much".

Provocation Stimuli (PS). Three scenarios were selected on the basis of independent pretesting so that they: (a) significantly differed from each other and (b) represented increasing degrees of provocativeness:

Low Provocativeness

> Linda, a twenty-three year old woman is studying in the school library. She has on jeans, a shirt and sneakers. She is sitting with her legs propped on an adjacent chair with a book open across her knees.

Moderate Provocativeness

> Joan, a twenty-three year old woman is sitting at the bar, with her legs crossed, sipping a drink. She has on a low cut dress, sheer stockings and strapless sandals.

High Provocativeness

Jackie a twenty-three year old woman is dancing on stage at a topless club. She has on a g-string, fishnet stockings and high heels.

The three scenarios were crossed completely with victim rape history (i.e., raped once before versus never been raped before) resulting in six vignettes. The scenarios were embedded in a common fictional rape account (i.e., attack occurring in a parking lot).

Procedure

Upon arrival, a female experimenter introduced the task as a "study of reactions to rape victims." Subjects completed the DQ; and read one of the six vignettes. Participants then returned these materials and completed the RQ and manipulation check items.

Results

Check items

Ninety-four percent of the subjects correctly reported the presence of a rape history when indeed there was one. Females were slightly more aware of the absence of a rape history than were males (92% vs. 86%). Both males and females were able to discriminate among the three levels of provocativeness nearly one hundred percent of the time.

Dependent measures

A 2 (sex of subject X 2 (rape history) X 3 (provocativeness) MANOVA was performed on the nine RQ items. Table 1 indicates a significant interaction for sex by provocativeness and main effects for each of the independent variables.

Univariate F tests for the sex by provocativeness interaction revealed a significant effect for RQ items 1 and 7. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for items 1 and 7. For both items, results of Tukey a tests indicated that for males, all three levels of provocativeness differed from each other. Females did not differentiate between the medium and high provocative condition, but did perceive differences between the low and both the medium and the high provocative condition.

Univariate F tests for sex were significant for RQ items 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9. Table 3 shows that females, more than males, wanted the victim to blame what happened on the man (Item 2). Males thought that the victim blamed the rapist more than females thought she did (Item 3). Conversely, females thought that the victim blamed herself more than the males thought she did (Item 4). Finally, males more than females, perceived the victim as more at fault for the rape (Item 9).

The MANOVA also revealed a main effect for provocativeness. Table 4 shows that the univariate *F* tests for RQ items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 were significant and are summarized in Table 4. Results of Tukey a tests revealed significant differences between each level of provocativenss for items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9.

Finally, the univariate tests for rape history (Table 5) were significant for RQ items 1 and 6. Subjects wanted the victim with a rape history to accept more blame for her actions than the victim with no rape history (Item 1). Victims with a rape history were also viewed as the "type of person" who gets herself into such situations more than victims without a rape history (Item 6).

Discussion

This study investigated the impact of rape history and provocativeness on male and female observers' perceptions of the victim and her assailant. All participants completed the RQ which was designed to measure attributional dimensions of assigned blame. Manipulation checks indicated that observers accurately discerned the experimental conditions.

The MANOVA observer sex and victim provocativeness interaction is consistent with other findings (Krulewitz, 1982). Males, more than females, appear to ascribe to victims' acceptance of blame in proportion to her degree of

provocativeness prior to the attack. An interesting aspect of this interaction concerns the female observers' proclivity for viewing the medium and high provocative victim's behavior as equally causative; and similarly equally self blameworthy. For female observers some threshold may exist above which they are likely to disregard the degree of victim provocativeness and make blanket judgements about rape victim's self blameworthiness. Female observers may believe that even the moderately provocative victims are knowingly placing themselves in a potentially dangerous and powerless position and therefore are as responsible for the assault as are highly provocative victims. This suggests that relative to men women observers may be less empathic toward and more critical of rape victims if pre-attack victim behavior fails to meet some standard.

The present findings indicate that observer sex influences attributions of blame. In general, females tend to be more empathic toward the victim and more accusatory of the assailant than are males. The phenemenon of the "psychological rape experience" (Krulewitz, 1982) may assist in accounting for these differences. This notion asserts that the emotional subjective experience of sexual assault as threatening, dangerous, and as helplessness-inducing is one that females may apprehend better than

males. As such, female observers may be more capable of vicariously experiencing the specific emotional, mental, and physical consequences of a rape experience. This notion also aids in understanding the more specific finding that females, compared to males, thought the victim blamed herself more. As Holmstrom and Burgess (1975) have documented, during the acute phase of the post-rape experience many victims psychologically re-enact the attack and imagine themselves behaving differently at critical times, thus perhaps changing the outcome of the assault.

Conversely, compared to females, male observers assigned more blame to the victim and thought the victim blamed the attacker more. These findings appear consistent with the gender differences found by others (Calhoun et al., 1976; Krulewitz, 1978). Males may be more likely to have had the experience of being attracted by a seemingly "available" member of the opposite sex only to have their advances rebuffed. Resulting feelings (e.g., frustration, humiliation) may precipitate a wish to strike back at females. Males may view the rapist's assault as an extreme example of vindictively motivated behavior and therefore are unwilling to place all the blame on the assailant. This is not to suggest that the male observers in this study condone rape, but rather that to some degree they may identify or empathize with the rapist's motivations.

The implications of these sex differences may be significant for the rape victim. Many victim's initial post-rape contact involves medical (e.g., doctor) or legal (e.g., police officer) personnel who are often males. To the extent that service providers of each gender differentially ascribe to views about rape, the victim may encounter more initial acceptance from females.

Observers in this study evaluated the victim's degree of provocativeness and possibly considered her responsible to a degree in this light. Consistent with other's findings (Scroggs, 1976; Kanekar & Kolsawalla, 1981; Kanekar, et al., 1981; Best & Demin, 1982), observers attributed increasing amounts of blame to the victim as her level of provocativeness intensified. Plausibly observers shift the weight of blame attribution more from the assailant to the victim as the victim's provocation increases. Thus, at higher levels of provocativeness, the victim may no longer be perceived as "helpless," but as cunning or perhaps simply careless. In either case, observers may view the more provocative victim's behavior as instigative via fliration or teasing. This view seems consistent with the "just world" view that would predict that the provocative victim was getting what she deserved.

The implications of this finding suggests that rape victims who are viewed as more provocative may expect a

less empathic treatment. Since the current sample consisted of undergraduate students and sheds light on how victims would be viewed, it remains to be determined whether victims would be perceived similarly by others with whom they have differential relationships (e.g., friends, family, mental health service-providers). Victim's rape history was a factor that observers considered when assigning blame. Results of this study add support to others' findings that increasing blame is attributed to rape victims to the extent that they are perceived to possess qualities which make them more likely targets for the assault (Cann et al., 1979; Amir, 1971). Victims with a rape history were more often judged to possess such rape-inducing qualities and consequently were blamed more than were victims with no rape history.

Observers might expect victims with a rape history to have profited by their experience in such a way that they could have avoided the second rape. Observers may assume that recidivist rape victims possess qualities which elicit repeat assault. Indeed this notion appears congruent with data suggesting that multiple incident rape victims are less well adjusted and perhaps less able to accurately judge potentially dangerous situations (Ellis, Atkerson, & Calhoun, 1982). This would seem to suggest recidivist victims may be in need of differential kinds of

intervention. Victims with a rape history may require at least the level of care that first time victims receive during the acute phase of the post-rape trauma, but observers may not entertain such considerations. However, observers may consider victims in need of directive interventions. Thus observers might regard as more useful educative steps such as helping the multiple-rape victim more accurately discriminate between dangerous versus non-dangerous people and situations.

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Table 1

MANOVA for the Nine RQ Items

Source	df	F	p
Sex (A)	9,123	2.77	.01
Provocativeness (B)	18,246	4.63	.00
Rape History (C)	9,123	2.04	.04
A x B	19,246	1.65	.05
A x C	9,123	1.73	.09
B x C	19,246	.64	.86
A x B x C	19,246	.96	.51

Note. Multivariate analysis used Wilk's criterion.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Sex and Provocativeness

Item	Subject Sex	Provocativeness		
		High	Medium	Low
	Males			
RQ 1	*M*	3.71	2.83	1.29
	SD	2.07	1.81	.45
	Females			
	M	2.00	1.92	1.43
	SD	1.59	1.41	1.04
	Males			
RQ 7	*M*	4.33	2.29	1.75
	SD	1.93	1.33	.94
	Females			
	M	3.46	3.13	1.22
	SD	1.96	1.90	.52

Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and F Values for Observer Sex

RQ Item	Male[a]		Female[b]		
	M	SD	M	SD	F[c]
1. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to accept blame for her own actions?	2.61	1.88	1.79	1.37	8.90 **
2. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to blame what happened on the man?	5.63	1.50	6.35	1.12	10.79 ***
3. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames the man for what happened?	6.15	1.31	5.55	1.55	6.35 *
4. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames herself for what happened?	2.82	1.71	3.72	1.88	8.95 **
5. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior contributed to her rape?	3.17	1.95	2.85	1.77	1.07
6. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is the type of person who gets herself into these situations?	3.06	1.89	2.66	1.77	1.65
7. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior immediately before the assault caused the rape?	2.79	1.82	2.62	1.87	.31
8. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. had an unconscious desire to be raped?	1.50	1.26	1.24	.84	2.13
9. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is at fault?	2.56	1.81	1.92	1.35	5.72 *

[a] $n = 72$; [b] $n = 71$; [c] $df = 1, 141$

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

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Table 4 Means, Standard Deviations, and F Values for Provocativeness

RQ Item	Provocativeness						
	High[a]		Medium[b]		Low[c]		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F[d]
1. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to accept blame for her own actions?	2.85	2.02	2.38	1.67	1.36	.79	10.94 **
2. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to blame what happened on the man?	5.42	1.64	6.10	1.28	6.45	.80	7.65 **
3. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames the man for what happened?	5.79	1.44	5.85	1.56	5.91	1.40	.08
4. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames herself for what happened?	3.02	1.72	3.21	1.81	3.57	2.00	1.10
5. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior contributed to her rape?	4.23	1.92	3.08	1.61	1.68	.98	31.99 **
6. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is the type of person who gets herself into these situations?	3.75	2.02	3.19	1.73	1.62	.82	22.30 **
7. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior immediately before the assault caused the rape?	3.90	1.97	2.71	1.68	1.49	.80	27.97 **
8. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. had an unconscious desire to be raped?	1.73	1.65	1.31	.66	1.06	.32	4.93 *
9. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is at fault?	2.81	2.01	2.44	1.57	1.45	.72	10.04 **

[a] $n = 48$; [b] $n = 48$; [c] $n = 47$; [d] $df = 2,140$

* $p < .01$
** $p < .001$

Table 5 Means, Standard Deviations, and F Values for Rape History

RQ Item	Rape History[a]		No Rape History[b]		
	M	SD	M	SD	F[c]
1. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to accept blame for her own actions?	2.49	1.90	1.92	1.41	4.15 *
2. If Jackie B. had come to talk to you: How much would YOU want her to blame what happened on the man?	5.93	1.45	6.04	1.29	.24
3. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames the man for what happened?	5.79	1.48	5.92	1.44	.26
4. How much do YOU think Jackie B. blames herself for what happened?	3.25	1.84	3.28	1.86	.01
5. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior contributed to her rape?	3.08	1.81	2.93	1.92	.24
6. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is the type of person who gets herself into these situations?	3.25	1.79	2.46	1.81	6.80 **
7. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B.'s behavior immediately before the assault caused the rape?	2.86	1.76	2.55	1.92	1.02
8. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. had an unconscious desire to be raped?	1.43	1.10	1.31	1.05	.45
9. To what extent do YOU think Jackie B. is at fault?	2.39	1.73	2.08	1.51	1.25

[a] $n = 72$; [b] $n = 71$; [c] $df = 1,141$

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

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